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SUBJECT: DISPLACEMENT TRENDS IN DARFUR

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Summary and Comment

¶1. After a relative lull in fighting and displacements for most of 2005, November and December marked an increase in the size and frequency of population movements within Darfur that has yet to subside. Many movements have resulted, in large part, from struggles for territory and influence between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF), or those loyal to them, and the Sudan Liberation Army (SLA). This has been particularly true in South Darfur, but other factors include continued militia attacks on villages and internally displaced person (IDP) camps, general harassment of civilians, ethnically based rivalry and conflict, and National Movement for Reform and Development (NMRD) activities in the Kulbus corridor of West Darfur. Primary areas of instability in which population movements have occurred include Mershing, Shaeria, and Gereida in South Darfur and areas of Jebel Marrah and Zalengei, West Darfur.

¶2. Overall, violence in Darfur is escalating to levels not seen since 2003/2004. Field sources indicate that insecurity may increase further given the current posturing of armed factions. The February 14 downing of an SAF helicopter by the SLA near Shaeria, South Darfur makes the scenario of increased fighting more likely. In addition, proxy fighting continues along the Sudan/Chad border, the humanitarian implications of which remain unknown given the lack of access. End Summary and Comment.

Numbers of Displaced

¶3. While the numbers of displaced have been considerable in some cases, it is important to note that recent movements constitute a second or third displacement for many of the affected groups. This means that the number of newly displaced cannot simply be added to existing IDP caseload figures to arrive at the new number of IDPs in Darfur, as many were already included in the old figures.

¶4. The overall number of IDPs reported in the U.N.

Humanitarian Profile remained remarkably consistent at approximately 1.8 million in 2005 up to the latest report issued for November. A decrease of 70,000 from October to November can be explained by the October 4 headcount in Kalma camp, which brought the previous artificially inflated figure of 163,000 down to approximately 90,000. Available statistics do not yet reflect the periods of increased violence and displacements, but the U.N. Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Assistance (OCHA) reported that more than 26,000 people were displaced in South Darfur in December alone.

Major Population Movements

--Mershing--

15. Mershing is the site of the largest recent movement of IDPs in Darfur. Harassment of IDPs by armed Arab militia had been ongoing in the area for months, and IDPs had asked repeatedly for a full-time AMIS presence in the area. After a January 18 SLA attack on Sudanese government police outside of Mershing that killed 4 police officers and wounded 10, Arab militia began conducting retaliatory attacks in the following days on Kaile IDP camp and extensive looting of Mershing market. According to U.N. sources, Sudanese government police supported these actions of the militia that killed four to six people and injured an additional eight. In the environment of fear created by the attacks, an estimated 55,000 people are believed to have fled toward the nearby village of Menawashi between January 25 and 27. The number of displaced included 35,000 people that had been

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living in Mershing-area IDP camps and 20,000 former residents of Mershing town.

16. As of February 12, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) reported that all but 1,500 of the 55,000 Mershing town residents and area IDPs in Menawashi had returned to Mershing. Strongly motivated to encourage returns, the Sudanese government Humanitarian Aid Commission (HAC) met a series of demands by the IDPs, including replacing the Mershing police commander and police officers, integrating local police officers from Mershing into the new police force, and organizing trucks to facilitate the return. In addition, African Union Mission in Sudan (AMIS) Civilian Police (CIVPOL) established a base in Mershing and the AMIS protection force increased the frequency of their patrols. IOM is also verifying a non-governmental organization (NGO) report of the arrival of approximately 200 families from Mershing in Otash camp outside of Nyala.

17. The NGO World Vision reported that looting by Mershing-area IDPs and residents in the aftermath of the displacement caused extensive setbacks for the organization's programs. One fully equipped primary health care center, five child-friendly spaces, a school, a women's center, and the agency guesthouse in Mershing were all completely pillaged - including the structures themselves. World Vision and community leaders are attempting to recover stolen goods to allow local programs to resume operations, although this looting has unfortunately negated many months of progress for the organization.

--Shaeria--

18. According to U.N. sources, the situation in Shaeria, South Darfur, is complex and involves power struggles between the Sudanese government and the SLA, as well as deepening enmity between the Birgit and Zaghawa ethnic groups. The town is controlled by the government but is

located on the edge of territory controlled by the SLA. In November, militia from the Arab Birgit ethnic group and government soldiers reportedly began to harass and attack non-Arab Zaghawa civilians in an effort to "defend Shaeria" from SLA takeover due to the assumption that Zaghawa are natural SLA sympathizers. This violence led an initial group of approximately 400 Zaghawas to seek protection by moving outside of the AMIS compound near the town. SLA subsequently began retaliatory attacks on behalf of their ethnic brethren, causing the rapid deterioration of security and economic activity in the area.

¶9. Despite an official attempt by the government to restrict movements out of the town, as of February 12, the NGO Solidarites reported that only 15,000 to 17,800 of the original 32,000 residents remained in Shaeria. The displaced are scattered in a number of locations. More than 10,000 people believed to have come from Shaeria have recently arrived in Wada'a, North Darfur, and thousands more are thought to be scattered in the countryside between Shaeria and the towns of Muhajiriya and Labado. Some Shaeria IDPs have made it as far as the North and South Darfur state capitols of El Fasher and Nyala. As of February 14, the number of Zaghawa citizens living in the vicinity of the AMIS compound outside of Shaeria had risen to as many as 1,000.

¶10. On January 25, the Sudanese government conducted an aerial attack approximately 10 kilometers east of Shaeria in an apparent attempt to drive back the SLA. While many IDPs were believed to be living in the area, the number of casualties and the humanitarian needs remains unknown because assessments cannot be carried out until the area is cleared of unexploded ordnance by AMIS troops. As a result of this event, Medecins Sans Frontieres-Holland (MSF-H) and Solidarites evacuated staff on January 26, leaving no international humanitarian presence in Shaeria. Furthermore, on February 14, as the SAF again shelled the area east of Shaeria, the SLA shot down an SAF helicopter, leaving many to anticipate further hostilities resulting from retaliation.

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--Gereida--

¶11. The U.N. reported that as many of 20,000 IDPs fled to Gereida from surrounding areas during November when, according to AMIS reports, militias looted and burned 26 area villages. This movement increased the total number of IDPs in Gereida to 63,000. Problems in the region began between the Fellata and Masalit ethnic groups, and ensuing fighting involved numerous factions including the Sudanese government, SLA, JEM, and Fellata and Masalit militia. In late December, SLA forces took control of the town. According to ICRC who is in the process of verifying the number of new IDPs, the IDP population in Gereida has grown to between 80,000 and 90,000 as of mid February. OXFAM reports that new IDP families are arriving in Gereida daily.

¶12. Gereida is reported to be tense and additional violence remains likely, with large numbers of armed nomads amassed in the area (reftel A, reftel B). AMIS reported that it is cooperating with the South Darfur Wali to implement a peace process in Gereida with the Fullata, Masalit, Reizegat, and Habaniya ethnic groups. One of the principles of the process is that all militias should withdraw from Gereida; however, it is doubtful that the SLA will agree to do so.

¶13. Related to the situation in Gereida is the nearby town of Donkey Dereissa, which the SLA took control of on December 6. As a result of the heavy fighting, nearly all people from Donkey Derieda are believed to have fled.

The U.N. Department of Safety and Security (UNDSS) estimated a total of approximately 6,500 people had fled in the direction of Unkunya and scattered as far north as Kalma Camp.

--Jebel Marrah--

¶14. Jebel Marrah is a location of long-standing friction between government and SLA forces. U.N. sources report that clashes between the SAF and the SLA on December 24 resulted in two new groups of IDPs totaling an estimated 21,000 people near Daya in the Rokoro locality of Jebel Marrah. An estimated 10,000 IDPs took refuge in Tibon village; and the populations in nine villages near Kia accommodated approximately 5,000 IDPs and an additional 6,000 took shelter in the surrounding mountains.

¶15. On January 23, SLA forces entered Golo town and engaged in heavy fighting with SAF troops (reftel C). The NGOs GOAL, MSF-Spain, and Danish Refugee Council (DRC) evacuated by road with assistance from AMIS troops after being unable to secure assurances of safe passage by the two armed groups. It remains unknown, largely due to the absence of the humanitarian community, whether the fighting resulted in the displacement of civilians. On January 25, GOAL also evacuated staff from Daya as a precautionary measure due to the likelihood of conflict. However, a technical malfunction caused the U.N. evacuation helicopter to crash, killing one national staff member.

--Zalengei--

¶16. From December 13 to 15, heavy fighting between two Arab ethnic groups, the Jamala and the Bagara, displaced more than 8,500 people near Nyangadula in the Abata locality of West Darfur. (Note: Nyangadula is located approximately 40 km north of Zalengei and in the vicinity of Golo. End note.) According to a USAID NGO partner, the violence resulted in the displacement of both Bagara and Fur populations south to Zalengei, and Jamalas to Saraf Omra in North Darfur. Fur communities were generally not involved in the fighting but fled the area largely to avoid being drawn in to the fighting on the side of the Bagara, who had previously provided the Fur with security from other Arab groups.

¶17. According to NGO reports, nearly 2,500 Fur IDPs settled in the existing Hamidiya camp and nearly 3,800 Bagara Arabs settled in a new camp in the Taiba area just

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outside Zalengei. In addition, a portion of the displaced established shelters near the AMIS Sector 7 Headquarters in Zalengei. An estimated 2,500 Jamala arrived in Saraf Omra. As of January 23, the U.N. World Food Program (WFP) reported that 10 percent of those displaced to Saraf Omra had returned to their communities of origin in West Darfur.

Future Displacements and Humanitarian Response

¶18. A general trend is beginning to emerge in which recent sites of large displacements have shared strong similarities in the lead up to events. In particular, it has often been in locations near where government- and SLA-held territory border and where SLA often agitate or orchestrate low-level attacks on government targets such as police stations or SAF vehicle convoys. Arab militias, in turn, retaliate on behalf of the government with increasing proxy attacks against individual civilians, then escalate to general looting and attacks on civilian centers in IDP camps or towns, and eventually heighten insecurity to a point at which civilians flee in

large number. As one example, Kutum, North Darfur, is increasingly worrisome when viewed in this light. Following multiple small-scale events including an attack on the Head of Military Intelligence, presumably by the SLA, Arab militia entered Kutum town and fired on civilians on February 12, injuring three and killing one. General fear and insecurity are increasing in the nearby IDP camps of Kutum and Fata Borno, with rumors of larger attacks looming.

¶19. Given that security is continuing to trend downward, USAID's Darfur Field Office expects to see significantly more displacements in the coming weeks and months. This increased IDP caseload will place an even larger response burden on the humanitarian community in this time of extremely difficult access. In addition to ongoing hotspots likely to produce large IDP movements, localized attacks and displacement continue largely unreported. This level of violence is a marked increase over last year and reminiscent of 2003/2004.

HUME